



## THE LANGUAGE OF ASHDOD

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Words are important. They convey meaning and if correctly chosen, they allow us to accurately communicate with each other. But if we are careless with our words, great confusion is often the result. People can be misled because someone didn't use the right language to convey a thought or concept. There's a story in the Old Testament about God's people losing their ability to speak God's language. It's recorded in Nehemiah 13:23-24. The bible says: "In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people." The people of God committed a grave sin that resulted in their losing their uniqueness. The language of God became corrupted by the language of paganism. The bible says they spoke the language of Ashdod. Did you know that language is still alive in the world today? In fact, some Christians even speak it fluently.

It was about 400 BC and it had been 100 years after the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile. Nehemiah was appointed Governor by the Persian king Artaxerxes. He set out to rebuild the broken walls of the city and restore the true worship of God. He led the people to confess and turn from their sins and re-dedicate themselves to the Lord. They agreed to be a holy people and separate themselves to God. This meant that they were to remain separate from the foreigners around them. They were not to inter-marry with other nations and become polluted by the sin and evil around them. For example, on the day the new wall was dedicated, the Bible says in Nehemiah 13:1 "In that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever..."

All was going well until Nehemiah had to go away on official business. The Bible doesn't tell us how long he was gone, but it was long enough for the people to go astray. In Nehemiah's absence, the temple was forsaken, and the service of God was once again corrupted and profaned. When Nehemiah returned and saw what had happened, he was angry and once again set out to purify the nation. One of the things that Nehemiah found that greatly upset him was that the Jews had married pagan women. They had directly disobeyed God and married outside of their own nation. God forbade His people from marrying

pagans, all the way back to the time they had inherited the Land of Canaan when God forbade them from marrying the Canaanites. For one reason, because of the evil influence their wives would have on them. That still happens among the people of God today. The kingdom of Christ, today, transcends international boundaries and it is not wrong to marry one of another nationality or ethnicity. Spiritual Israel, the church, is to be separate from the world just as national Israel back then was to remain separate from other nations.

Sometimes, a Christian will marry a non-Christian with good intentions of bringing their unbelieving husband or wife to Christ. More times than not, it works the other way... and in time they give in to the worldly values of their spouse and end up either weak spiritually or unfaithful altogether. Well, that's exactly what happened to these Jews in Judah. They married pagan women and the Bible says, it wasn't long until they didn't even talk like Jews anymore. They married women from Ashdod, and instead of the women of Ashdod learning to speak the Jews' language, these Jewish husbands instead learned to speak the language of Ashdod. Not only that, but the Bible also says they forgot their own language. It says they COULD NOT speak in the language of the Jews any longer. The Bible says that Nehemiah "contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?" (Nehemiah 13: 25-27).

There's an important lesson in that for us today. Just as God expected the Jews to be a holy and separate people then, He also expects spiritual Israel, His church, to remain separate today as well. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." That is not only true when it comes to heathen idolatry but it's true regarding any kind of false religion.

The Bible repeatedly warns us that there will be false teachers who promote false doctrines and false religions and to compromise with such is not only dangerous, but also wrong. There are many false doctrines in the religious today. Not only are they not taught in the word of God, but they are also contrary to what is taught and result in people being led away from the truth of apostolic Christianity. But because many Christians don't heed the warning and compromise with error – they begin speaking the language of the religions around them instead of the language of God which we read in the Bible. When Christians speak the language of Ashdod, they convey false concepts and erroneous doctrines.

The Bible teaches that Christians are to use Bible language to express Bible concepts. 1 Peter 4:10 says: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God". The word 'oracles' means 'an utterance' or something spoken. So, Peter is simply saying, if a man speaks, He is to speak as God has spoken. Friend, words are important and we're to use them carefully! 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 says: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom

teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” In other words, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets who gave us the scriptures with the very words God wanted used to convey His will to men.

So, words are significant and every word in the original text of scripture is there for a reason. Not only that, but it’s interesting and significant that Christ came at the time that He did and that He was born into the world of that time. The language His apostles wrote the New Testament in was Koine’ Greek which was the common tongue in the Roman Empire of Jesus’ day. Scholars can study and read from it today, but it is not a modern language that is changing such as English is today. Many English words today don’t mean the same thing they did 100 or 200 years ago. Ancient Greek is not this way. What that means is, the words penned by the apostles 2,000 years ago have the same meaning today that they did then. That’s God’s providence and His wisdom in revealing His word. It goes to show how important words and their usage are to God.

So, we need to be careful that we don’t play fast and loose with the word of God and speak in a way that injects human reasoning and man-made doctrine into the text. With that said – there are many, many things that people say in religion today that simply are not found in the word of God. They’re not even parallel to what is taught in the Bible – they’re in addition to it and contrary to it and they help propagate many a false doctrine that is held to in the so-called Christian world today.

What is the modern ‘language of Ashdod’? Let me give you a few examples: First... some speak the language of Ashdod when it comes to how people are saved! Do you ever hear Christians talking about accepting or inviting Jesus into your heart? It’s so common to hear someone say if you want to be saved, simply ask Jesus to come into your heart and save you... or accept Jesus and let Him become your personal Lord and Savior... that you would you think you could find several verses of scripture where people are told to do that very thing. But, my friend, that’s Ashdodic language... because that’s the vernacular of denominational evangelists, not the language of the apostles.

The book of Acts is a record of the apostles preaching the gospel to the world beginning at Pentecost. There are several times in the book of Acts where we read about people being saved from their sins after hearing the gospel preached – and not one single one says that anybody was told to accept or receive Jesus into their hearts to be saved. We read in Acts 2:38 where they were told to “Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins...” but, strangely, that’s not what most preachers today tell people who want to know how to be saved. We read in Acts 3:19 where sinners were told to “repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out...”. We read in Acts 8 where Simon believed and was baptized and where the Eunuch of Ethiopia confessed that he believed in Christ as the Son of God and was baptized. Saul was told in Acts 9, as recounted by Paul in Acts 22:16 to “arise and be baptized and wash away his sins calling on the name of the Lord.” We read where Cornelius was told to be baptized in Acts 10. Lydia believed Paul’s preaching and was baptized, and the Philippian jailor was told to believe on the Lord and the same hour of the night was baptized. Both stories are recorded in Acts chapter 16. The Corinthians in Acts 18 believed and were baptized. Nowhere, however, was anyone told to accept Jesus into their heart to be saved.

Someone says, ‘but isn’t that what we are doing when we are saved – is accepting the Lord? Well, we are receiving Jesus and His truth but not in the sense that such language implies. The Bible teaches in Ephesians 3:17 that Christ dwells in the Christian’s heart by faith. But that occurs when a person submits to Christ and obeys His will... There’s not a single word in any of the accounts of the preaching of the gospel where someone was told to ask the Lord to come into their hearts. The Lord takes up His abode

and reign within our hearts when we are united with Him in faith, repentance, and baptism, according to Romans 6:3-5. If we want to speak the language of the apostles and of the Holy Spirit, we can talk of one being believing on the Lord (Acts 16:31), being baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27); obeying the gospel (Romans 10:16, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9) but accepting Christ into one's heart as though Christ can simply prayed into one's heart and life is the language of Ashdod.

We also hear the language of Ashdod when it comes to the CHURCH. I suppose the word 'church' is one of the most misunderstood, misused, and misapplied words in the Bible. It is used by most people to refer to a building or place, a denomination, an ecclesiastical organization and so forth. But in the Bible, it's used in only two ways (or three, depending upon how specific you want to be). It is used universally to describe the spiritual relationship of all who have obeyed the gospel to God. The word 'church' comes from the Greek word 'ecclesia' which means 'called out'. In this sense it means all people who have been called out of the world and into a new relationship with Christ through faith in and obedience to the gospel. The universal church is not a visible, world-wide organization. The word used in this sense is merely a description of those who have been saved from their sins and expresses their unique and exclusive relationship to God through Christ. Phrases like 'church of God' or 'church of the firstborn' are descriptions of all of those who are saved in the Lord.

The word 'church' also refers to a local assembly of believers. Romans 16:16 says "the churches of Christ salute you." It's not talking about a human organization... it is merely describing congregations of like faith throughout the world who come together in the name of Christ or according to His word to function as a body of believers.. to worship and serve together. It NEVER refers to a building. We sometimes talk about 'going to church'. We nearly all fall into this kind of speech but we should be careful. It's true that in a sense, the word church refers to a local assembly of Christians, but if we want to speak the language of God and not imply a false concept, it is better to talk about assembling with the church or going to the assembly. Many have the wrong idea though and characterize the church as a building or a tangible entity that we can go to and then detach ourselves from. We need to be careful about the language of Ashdod. The language we use can depict the church as a denomination instead of what it is: the body of Christ. Sometimes, I hear people talk about 'Church of Christ doctrine'... but the bible doesn't use that kind of language. There's the gospel; the doctrine of Christ; the truth; and every church of Christ is to preach and practice that doctrine, but it's not church of Christ doctrine. It's the doctrine of Christ.

Then we hear the language of Ashdod when it comes to preachers and preaching. Do you ever hear the preacher called a pastor? That's usually not correct. A pastor is the same thing as an elder and there's a difference between the work of an elder or pastor and the work of a preacher, teacher, or evangelist. Not only that, but elders or pastors are always spoken of as a plurality of men in a congregation, not one man who stands and preaches.

Do you hear people call the preacher a reverend? That's the language of Ashdod. The scriptures never use such language to describe a preacher or any other man. The Lord's name is reverend or to be revered according to Psalm 111:9 but the preacher is a man just like any other in the kingdom of God. He just does a distinct work. So, why do people use such terms to describe preachers? It's because they're speaking the language of Ashdod, you see. They've been influence by the Catholic doctrine of a priesthood, separate from that of all believers, and of a supposed distinction between the so-called clergy and laity. But the Bible makes no such distinction. Are preachers to be respected? Absolutely, if they preach the truth. But not because they occupy some higher relationship to God but simply because of the work they do in serving the kingdom.

Let us remember, Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:13, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” Speak sound words – speak the oracles of God – not the foreign language of spiritual Ashdod.

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